

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Report 2003-1

OFFICE OF CITY AUDITOR -- SEATTLE

January 30, 2003

Highlights the Office of City Auditor's report regarding rate assistance services for low-income City Light customers. A copy of the full report can be obtained at the Auditor's web site: <http://seattle.gov/audit> or call Thyra Brooks at 206-233-3801. If you have any questions or comments regarding this report, or would like to provide suggestions for future audits, please call Susan Cohen, Seattle City Auditor, at 206-233-3801.

IMPROVING RATE ASSISTANCE SERVICES FOR LOW-INCOME SEATTLE CITY LIGHT CUSTOMERS

AUDIT OBJECTIVE

The Office of City Auditor evaluated the City Light Low-Income Rate Assistance Program to determine if the program is operated in an efficient and cost-effective manner and achieves its program objective to reach eligible low-income electric customers.

SUGGESTIONS

The Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens should improve its written procedures and guidelines for staff that review customer eligibility.

The Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens should consider testing the accuracy of applications from selected applicants.



The Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens publishes brochures in numerous languages to market the program.

RATE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM RUN COMPETENTLY

Seattle City Light contracts with the Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens to administer three programs that assist low-income customers with paying their electric bills.

- Rate 26 for Seniors and People with Disabilities provides a discounted electric rate for eligible low-income seniors and persons with disabilities.
- Rate 27 provides for the discounted rate for low-income customers who are neither seniors nor disabled.
- Project Share, established by declaration of the Mayor in May 1983, is funded by public donations, (generally, SCL customer contributions). Grants from these donated funds help recipients pay portions of overdue electric bills.

The Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens has a team of 13 people who screen and enroll customers in the programs. Our review of the Low-Income Rate Assistance Programs focused on the effectiveness and efficiency of the Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens administration of three rate assistance programs, including its efforts to reach and serve eligible participants. We offer suggestions for improving outreach, refining written procedures and guidelines, improving equipment for processing applications, and evaluating controls on eligibility decisions.

The Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens is generally managing the rate assistance programs effectively, and is attempting to improve operational efficiencies with a newly consolidated, smaller rate assistance team. We found the Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens:

- Complied with applicable laws and ordinances;
- Adhered to the Memorandum of Agreement between Seattle City Light and the Human Services Department for administering the rate assistance programs; and
- Conformed to best management practices.